

**AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES**  
**May 5, 2011**  
**Bangs Community Center: Glass Room**

**Members Present:** Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Rosemary Kofler, Mary Jane Laus, Barbara Sutherland, Juana Trujillo, Jack Wollensak

**Absent:** Kathy Koplow

**Select Board Liaison:** Stephanie O'Keeffe

**Staff Present:** Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant)

**Guests:** Doris Holden (Treasurer of the Friends of the Amherst Senior Center), Barbara Slovin (President of the Friends), Jonathan Tucker (Town Planner), Ron Bohonowicz (Director of Facilities), Nicole Rohan (PVTA), Scott Merzbach (Gazette Reporter), Alan Root.

**Welcome:** Dan Clapp, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:03 AM.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting:** The minutes of the April 7, 2011 meeting were approved and accepted.

**FRIENDS**

**Treasurer's Report:**

**Doris** provided a handout showing \$15,431.32 in the checking account and \$82,208.99 in the investment account, plus a \$10,000 seven-month CD with interest at 1.0% maturing today at the Northampton Cooperative Bank. The Friends board agreed to increase to a \$15,000 seven-month CD for which the interest was at .75% in April. Nancy suggested checking CD interest rates at the TD Bank North.

The Treasurer's report was approved and accepted.

**Donations for FY11 to date:**

**Karen** stated that since July, 2010 the Friends has received \$13,054.70 of which \$10,299.81 came in just since the solicitation letter went out in the November newsletter.

**Follies Update:**

**Barbara Slovin** reported. A lot of work went into the Follies Show last Sunday and, although the audience was excited by the show, it was sad not to see a larger audience. We competed with several other community events. The question arises as to whether there are easier ways of making more money, since we have big goals for the Amherst Senior Center. We need more space and our senior population is growing.

**Dan** reminded us that one of Donna Lee's goals with the Follies was to "build community" by involving local talent. Does the community value the Follies for reasons beyond just financial support of the Senior Center?

**Stephanie** suggested involving artistic and musical groups at the schools if we continue with the 'variety show' concept.

It was pointed out that Donna Lee tried long and hard to involve those groups. She got no response from people at the schools.

**Ron Bohonowicz** named some key people to contact at the schools - the dance studio director, Tracy Vernon, and the choral director, Dave Ranen.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Gateway Concept Overview:**

**Jonathan Tucker** provided a handout with map. He gave a report on the history of the Gateway land and the present status. More than one year ago UMass purchased property between the north end of downtown and campus on which five fraternities sat. Buildings on the two acres were demolished and UMass intended to use the land for student housing, since it planned to expand the student body by 2500 over five years. About that time our Town Manager was eager to increase tax revenue for the Town through development. Since UMass did not want to be the sole developer of that land due to many state rules that would add to the cost, they sought a private developer to join them. UMass talked with the Town Manager who in turn talked with the Amherst Redevelopment Authority (ARA). The ARA operates by acquiring property then selling it back at a very low rate to private developers with conditions for how the property will be developed. There was a big push to move forward until the surrounding neighbors objected to student housing, fearing widespread inappropriate behavior similar to that of students in the nearby Southwest dormitories. The ARA proceeded by visiting other municipalities with similar situations, designed to benefit both town and campus. (Hanover, NH/Dartmouth; Storrs, CT/UConn).

When UMass was first created it was about one and one half miles from downtown Amherst. The area in between was developed haphazardly with lodging and boarding houses and poorly managed student housing, which created problems - something the neighbors did not want to bring back. In September 2009, the Town Manager, UMass and the ARA signed a general non-binding agreement of cooperation to do something. It did include student housing however, which inflamed matters. The Town Manager retired and the new Town Manager suggested pausing, stepping back and getting feedback from the community. With the help of ACP consultants, they began with a visioning process. On April 28, 29 and 30 they solicited feedback from residents on what they wanted for

the area. Neighbors were relieved to know their concerns were considered and their voices were heard. Many people feel that the north end of downtown needs to be expanded and strengthened. That is the Gateway Hinge or the area along Triangle Street. It is often one's first exposure to downtown Amherst. The Gateway itself (the Hinge), the north end of Kendrick Park, including the Motor Lodge and Mt. Pleasant apartments, would be targeted for 'signature' architecture and mixed uses. The property beyond that to the north is the 'corridor' itself, which would be largely non-student residential development. It is anticipated there will be growth in several populations and there will be increased need for housing for baby boomers, empty-nesters, and millennials. They will want to walk to Town, have access to mass transit and have urban amenities.

UMass is looking to attract the best and most highly qualified students who will bolster the university's growth and image. They want development that will serve the faculty and graduate students they are looking to attract.

UMass Trustees just authorized \$180 million to build an honors college on campus that will house 1500 undergraduates, which will help to meet the needs of the expanding the student body.

**Nancy** provided a hand out on the long-range plan for Amherst, which talks about the need for elder housing going forward. The Gateway is a prime location for low and moderate income housing for elders. It is close to Kendrick Park, seniors can walk to Town and the Senior Center, and the terrain is flat. Our 2010 Survey showed there is a desire for baby boomers and elders to stay in Amherst long-term. There is a long waiting list for low and moderate-income housing and the elder population is growing. The COA needs to stay involved in the Gateway project and advocate for elder housing and elder needs.

**Dan** advised a COA sub-committee to work with Joel on issues related to the Gateway project.

**Jonathan** announced that Saturday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, there would be a similar design process for the North Amherst Village Center at the Parish Hall. On May 15 there will be a design workshop for the Atkins Corner Village Center at the Franklin-Patterson Hall on Hampshire College. The Town is looking for the creation of plans for what will happen in the next ten years. It is everyone's opportunity to participate.

#### **PVTA Update:**

**Nicole Rohan** reported that PVTA ridership has increased considerably. Fixed route ridership is up by 3% (mostly in Springfield). Para-transit riders reached 31,000 in March (up from 26,000). Rising fuel costs is a big problem, especially for para-transit rides, thus the increased ridership is good. Fortunately, PVTA has been locked into low-rate fuel prices, but that contract expires on June 30, 2011. A draft budget in April showed a \$1.8 billion deficit. Fuel costs, health care costs and wage increases added to the deficit. Before making fare increases, the budget was carefully scrutinized for where cuts could be made. In addition, PVTA applied for a \$700,000 grant through the Pioneer Valley Travel Commission for the operating budget. UMass transit provided a one-time subsidy to PVTA for \$800,000. Contractors in Springfield have cut back on union overtime (promoted by the union). Hopefully, after those measures and all the cuts, there will be no budget deficit for next year AND no fare increases or service cuts. Senator Rosenberg has continued to be a trooper at the state level. He is trying to get legislation for forward funding, which would save about \$400,000 of interest payments on borrowed money.

Anyone wishing to use the American with Disabilities Act van service currently needs to fill out a lengthy thirteen-page application by mail. PVTA is starting a three-month pilot 'in person application' process. The applicant would get a free ride to a center, meet directly with a staff person, fill out the application on the spot and get questions answered. That way the staff person can be certain that all the information is complete and what used to take about two weeks to complete by mail would take only one day. The Amherst Senior Center will be one of the application centers. Applicants need to re-certify every three to five years.

PVTA has been working on an intelligent transportation system, using federal funding designated for projects. It would be used on all buses and vans and would automatically monitor the number of riders, have automatic enunciators (auditor and visual), have added security features, allow the driver to have a covert connection to the police and have a new surveillance system.

PVTA got a grant last year for \$6.2 million for ten hybrid buses with a contemporary, non-boxy look – five for UMass transit and five will be out of Springfield.

### **CONTINUING BUSINESS**

#### **Landscaping of Plaza:**

**Ron Bohonowicz** gave an update. The process is long as evidenced by a thick book containing the paperwork Ron wrote before he could proceed with the project. It contained specifications, documentation required by MA State law, etc. Today is the bid opening. Six or seven construction people visited to look at the project and today they will give Ron their figures for cost. If the bids are too high, some project features will be eliminated. Before Ron can award a contract, he needs to make certain it meets all legal requirements and insurance is in place. It may take another two-three weeks. Ron already has purchase orders for supplies like bricks. He has purchased the benches with a center post, bike racks, and paving blocks for the visually handicapped. There will be some inconveniences and the main door will have to be closed off for some time. The barricades will remain and there will be staging of materials.

Ron announced that since fuel costs are high the maintenance staff has been advised to consider the temperatures and manage the use of the air conditioning on a daily basis so as not to waste energy. Surely, he does not want folks to get uncomfortable however.

Ron will be building a dry, accessible storage space for Town papers inside the parking garage this summer.

#### **Parking Proposal:**

**Jack** reported on the plan discussed at the April COA meeting. Both Town Manager and the Select Board support the plan. It will be presented to the Amherst Parking Commission on May 17. The parking meters in Town lots will change this year to accept both credit card and cash. That may affect our proposed parking plan in that a magnetic strip might be issued instead of a window sticker for the \$25 annual senior parking permit.

#### **Budget Update:**

**Nancy** said the \$4000 the Friends pledged (in case the senior center has a budget gap in the personnel line item) may not be needed as the cut of State aid to cities and towns wasn't as bad as predicted. We do not yet know however the final figure for the Department of Elder Affairs (DEA) Formula Grant. That money is calculated by multiplying the number of residents 60+ (as counted by the Federal census) by a dollar amt which has yet to be determined by DEA. The grant pays approximately half of the salary of the senior center's administrative assistant.

### **SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE**

#### **Nominating Committee:**

**Jack** said a letter went to the Town Manager asking that Joel and Rosemary be appointed for two-year terms and that Juana Trujillo and Joan Golowich be appointed for three-year terms, thereby staggering the expiration of terms. Sue Dierks has been interviewed and she will replace Kathy Koplow, who can no longer participate on the COA because of family issues.

#### **Highland Valley Elder Services:**

**Joan** reported. Each meeting highlights a different portion of HVES vast services. This month a woman with her therapy dog spoke on how she trains therapy dogs to help elders and people with disabilities.

The budget and bringing costs in line with reality is a continuing concern. Most people whose services have been large are willing to cut back. Joan stressed that no meal recipients have been dropped without personal discussions.

**Maura** said that the UMass MOW program cannot legally deliver the noontime meals because of the HVES contract.

#### **Long Range Planning:**

**Jack** has been working on a survey of other senior centers and community centers in order to formulate design concepts for a new stand-alone senior center in Amherst or a refurbishing of the Bangs Center. He has visited four facilities thus far – Northampton, Enfield, Groton, and Glastonbury. They are all new, large, modern, single-storied buildings with ample parking. Jack makes an appointment with the director, tours the facility, determines the date occupied, area, cost, floor plan, visit per year, services offered, parking, staffing and the senior population of the town. He takes photos of the interior and exterior.

#### **COA Political Action Sub-Committee:**

Representative Ellen Story said she supports the amendment to increase the Formula Grant to \$8.6 million for FY12.

### **STAFF REPORTS**

**Maura** will meet with the Amherst College Center for Community Engagement regarding students becoming 'Friendly Visitors'. Lisa Raskin will not be teaching her course on aging this year.

Maura will also contact Hampshire College.

**Nancy** said that we have been offered a new regulation-size slate pool table. It would cost \$500.00 to move it. She will ask the Friends to cover that.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:47 AM.

**The next meeting of the COA will be held on June 9, 2011 at 9:00 AM at the Bangs Community Center.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the April 7, 2011 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.

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**Document List**

The following documents were made available to all members of the COA during the meeting. They are available for review at the Amherst Senior Center, 70 Boltwood Walk, Amherst MA.

1. Meeting Agenda.
2. Minutes of April 7, 2011 meeting.
3. Friends of the Amherst Senior Center Treasurer's Report.
4. 'Quick Books' Balance Sheet for Program Account, Travel Fund and Friends Account as of May 4, 2011.
5. The Amherst Gateway Project.
6. "Housing that meets the needs of special populations" taken from the Master Plan.
7. Subcommittee Report summaries.